

and used as a hard-copy reference in performing the development process.

Finally, FIG. 6 provides a series of tool icons 602. These tool icons may comprise the same tools identified in FIG. 4. Alternatively, these icons may present an additional group of tools that are particularly adapted to interact with the thermometer presentation.

The interface may optionally include a number of other pages (not shown) that can be used in performing the steps of the project. For instance, the application may provide an authorization screen (not shown) for identifying the different authorizing agents that must “sign-off” on a project at the completion of each principal step. An agent may indicate his authorization by entering his name with a keyboard, mouse, etc., or by entering his digital signature. The computer system may additionally provide well-known security features to ensure that only authorized agents enter information through the authorization screen. For example, the computer system can compare an entered password or signature against a database of authorized passwords and signatures. Further, the system may prevent a user from accessing new worksheets (pertaining to new principal steps) if the appropriate authorizations have not been obtained in any approval stage.

Another worksheet page (not shown) may present tools for developing a schedule to perform the project. Still another worksheet page (not shown) may present tools for performing cost-benefit analysis. Yet another worksheet page (not shown) may present tools for monitoring the performance of the IT product. Another worksheet tool (not shown) may pertain to tools for testing the IT product.

In summary, the above-described technique provides a structured approach to the formulation, implementation, control, and improvement of an IT product. The technique may therefore contribute to reduced development costs, delays, and complications in the development process.

To facilitate explanation, the above discussion was framed in the context of an exemplary business environment characterized by defined exemplary business considerations. However, it should be noted that the principles described here apply to many different business environments having correspondingly different business considerations. For instance, different business environments may use a different set

of authorizing agents than described above. Further, different business environments may attach different importance (or significance) to the agents' approval than described above. Accordingly, the above-described "preferred" modes of operation are exemplary and should not be construed as limitations on the invention as claimed.

5 More generally, while the foregoing description includes details and specificities, it is to be understood that these have been included for purposes of explanation only, and are not to be interpreted as limitations of the present invention. Many modifications to the embodiments described above can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, as is intended to be encompassed
10 by the following claims and their legal equivalents.